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ABSTRACT

To overcome various reporting constraints, numerous strategies have been developed to facilitate accurate and timely reporting of data concerning the impact of Louisiana's State-Funded Compensatory/Remedial Program. These strategies include: (1) using existing statewide communication networks; (2) employing the Basic Skills Test (BST) as the major data collection instrument; (3) identifying each student's skill deficiencies through the Student Profile Sheets; and (4) determining the impact of the program on students who are promoted through the Compensatory Education Tests. The evaluation results for the program were reported through the use of a modular format. The evaluation report drew primarily on data from the 1982, 1983, and 1984 administrations of the BST to provide longitudinal information concerning the effects of the program on student performance. As a result of this evaluation, two recommendations were made. The data supported the program on identified deficit skills but suggested that this focus be broadened to address additional skills prerequisite to the next grade level BST. Secondly, school systems were urged to consider carefully the decision to promote students who fail to attain the minimum performance standard on a specific BST; retention at the earliest level at which deficiencies are identified was strongly recommended. (PN)

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EVALUATION STRATEGIES: LOUISIANA'S STATE-FUNDED COMPENSATORY/REMEDIAL PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTION

The Louisiana Competency-Based Education Program is based on three major pieces of legislation. The first provided for the development of State minimum standards in reading, writing, and mathematics for all grades, kindergarten through grade 12. These standards were developed over a number of years by committees of teachers, curriculum specialists, central office staff, principals, and other education personnel at the State and local levels. Both the standards and their companion curriculum guides are in place in Louisiana's public schools.

The second piece of legislation established the State Basic Skills Testing Program to measure student attainment of the minimum standards. The first Basic Skills Test (BST) was administered in the spring of 1982 to all grade 2 public school students who were addressing State minimum standards in language arts and mathematics. One grade level has been added to the program each year so that in the spring of 1985 grades 2-5 will be tested.

The third major piece of legislation in the Competency-Based Program established the State-Funded Compensatory/Remedial Program to address skills identified as deficient on the BST. Services were first provided during the 1982 summer session and the 1982-83 regular school year for students who qualified by scoring below the State Board adopted minimum performance standard on the Grade 2 BST. The program has expanded each year so that 1984-85 services include remediation in skills at grades 2-4.

COMPENSATORY/REMEDIAL PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Louisiana State-Funded Compensatory/Remedial Program is administered by the Department of Education, Bureau of Elementary Education. State funds are allocated to local school systems on a per remediation unit basis for those students who score below the State Board adopted minimum performance standard on each grade level BST. Local systems must serve eligible students during the summer session and/or the regular school year immediately following the spring administration of the BST. Both State and local evaluations of the program are mandated by the legislation that established the program.

EVALUATION REPORTING CONSTRAINTS

The purpose of the State level evaluation of the Compensatory/ Remedial Program is to provide information to policy makers in the Louisiana Legislature, the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the State Department of Education about the impact of the program on education in Louisiana. In order for this information to be most useful, it must be made available within the stringent time frame under which the varied audiences operate. Over the years several constraints have had to be overcome in order to maximize the usefulness of this evaluative information.

One major obstacle encountered in the evaluation of the program has been the extreme difficulty associated with the reporting of complete census data concerning all students who qualify for the program. The logistics are becoming increasingly complex each year

with the expansion of the program to include additional grade levels. The program has grown from approximately 6,000 students served in 1982-83 to 25,500 in 1984-85. Numerous program characteristics have also contributed to the complexity of the data collection needed for reporting this kind of information. For example, students qualify for the program on the basis of their language arts and mathematics scores on the spring administration of the BST, but do not receive services until the summer and/or regular year session. Based on criteria specified in local school system Pupil Progression Plans, these students could be retained at the level tested or promoted to the next level for the subsequent school year during which services must be provided. These factors along with others associated with the mobility of eligible students have made the tracking of student progress from qualification through program completion extremely difficult, and in many cases, impossible.

The promotion/retention option among eligible students has placed an additional constraint on the evaluation in that it has limited the availability of pretreatment-posttreatment information on promoted students. Retained students are the only ones to take the same BST in successive years. Thus, other means of assessing the impact of the program on the performance of promoted students have had to be developed.

Conflicting Legislative and school calendars have created additional data collection and reporting constraints. The education and general appropriation committees of the Louisiana Legislature convene in March and April of each year with the general session running from

May through July. In order to be most useful, information concerning the impact of the compensatory education program must be made available to the committees during the same time period (March/April) during which the best indicator of that impact (the BST) is being administered. The results of that BST administration are generally not available until July/August, in other words, after the close of the session. Again, other means have had to be developed in order to provide the Legislature with the best information available at the time when it is most needed.

EVALUATION STRATEGIES

In order to overcome the various reporting constraints described, numerous strategies have been developed to facilitate the accurate and timely reporting of data concerning the impact of the State-Funded Compensatory/Remedial Program. A concerted effort has been made to utilize existing statewide communication networks in an attempt to minimize the disruptive effects of extensive data collection on local school systems. Much of the requested information concerning the program has been channeled through local system evaluators responsible for the evaluation of their local programs.

The major data collection instrument employed in the evaluation of the program has been the BST results. Student level means on the language arts and mathematics components of the test along with skill level diagnostic/prescriptive data have been the primary measure of program impact on student performance. Additionally, multi-copy Student Profile Sheets identifying each student's skill deficiencies

and requesting background information for each child have been disseminated to local school systems. These provide compensatory/remedial teachers with a vehicle for monitoring student progress, and, at the same time they also serve as a technique for State level data collection relative to each student served by the program. One copy of the form is forwarded to the Department of Education at the end of the summer session, a second updated copy is submitted at the end of the regular school year, the third is retained as a central office copy, and the original remains in the student's cumulative folder.

The constraints imposed by the nonavailability of pretreatment-posttreatment data have been addressed through the development of Compensatory Education Tests (CETs) that parallel each grade level BST. Through the use of these tests the impact of the program on students who are promoted, and thus take the next level BST after receiving services, can be determined. The CETs have been administered to samples of summer school participants in July and to regular year students in January/February so that the test results can be made available to the Legislative committees in March/April. The administration of the CETs also provides a vehicle for comparing the performance of the promoted and retained students who failed a particular grade level BST.

The evaluation results for the 1983-84 State-Funded Compensatory/Remedial Program were reported through the use of a modular format. In this manner, evaluative information relative to each topic addressed could be effectively and efficiently presented to the audiences of record for use within their required timelines. The publi-

cation dates and topics addressed by each report are listed below:

1983-84 REPORTING STRATEGIES

TIME	TOPIC
October 83	Student Placement Study
November 83	1983 Summer School Evaluation
February 84	Retention vs. Retention and Remediation
March 84	Program Issues
May 84	Preliminary Program Effects
June 84	Program Management
August 84	Program Formats
September 84	Final Evaluation

LONGITUDINAL PROGRAM EFFECTS

Through the use of the various data collection and reporting strategies previously discussed, the following results were presented in the final evaluation of the 1983-84 State-Funded Compensatory/ Remedial Program (September 1984). The report drew primarily on data from the 1982, 1983, and 1984 administrations of the Basic Skills Tests (BSTs) to provide longitudinal information concerning the effects of the program on student performance.

The results indicated that in the two years since the Grade 2 BST was first administered, means scores in both language arts and mathematics have improved slightly. Similar improvements were noted

in both areas on the second year of testing with the Grade 3 BST.

The improvement in BST scores led to a subsequent decrease in the number of students qualifying for compensatory/remedial services since the initial 1982 testing. At the same time, the average number of identified skill deficiencies among service qualifiers dropped.

The study indicated that students who failed to attain the minimum performance standard on a particular level BST, and who received compensatory/remedial services while being retained at that level, performed well when retested on the same BST. (An earlier study had found that the combination of retention and remediation was more effective than retention alone in terms of subsequent BST performance.) However, students who were promoted, and thus received compensatory/remedial services on lower level skills, did not perform well on the higher level BST.

The examination of longitudinal data for the group of compensatory/remedial students who initially qualified for services on the 1982 Grade 2 BST indicated that approximately two-thirds of these students had been retained once during the 1982-83 period. The performance of these students on the 1984 Grade 3 BST suggested that retention at grade 2 may be more cost effective than retention at grade 3 because, while 1984 scores were comparable, fewer remediation units had been required among the participants who had been retained at the earlier grade level.

Two recommendations were made as a result of this study. The data supported the continued focus of the State-Funded Compensatory/Remedial Program on identified deficit skills but suggested that this focus be broadened to address additional skills prerequisite to the

next grade level BST. This was viewed as particularly crucial for students who were promoted and had to take the next grade level BST after having received services in the lower level skills. Secondly, school systems were urged to consider very carefully the decision to promote students who fail to attain the minimum performance standard on a specific BST; retention at the earliest level at which deficiencies are identified was strongly recommended.

SUMMARY

The specific data collection and reporting constraints discussed in this paper relative to Louisiana's State-Funded Compensatory/Remedial Program, along with the evaluation strategies that have subsequently evolved to address these, provide an excellent illustration of the emerging State Education Agency (SEA) mode of operation in the reporting of evaluative data to their respective Legislatures. In spite of conflicting calendars, and in view of stringent time constraints, SEAs have adapted their reporting procedures to insure that the most effective and efficient use will be made of evaluation results. Not only the Legislature, but the State as a whole has benefited.